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LETTER DATED 13 FEBRUARY 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to enclose herewith, on behalf of Chief Tom Ikimi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the text of a press statement on the situation in Sierra Leone.

I would be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ibrahim A. GAMBARI
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Press statement on the situation in Sierra Leone

We have continued to monitor developments in Sierra Leone and believe that the international community has followed the events in that country also with keen interest.

With the signing of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peace plan on Sierra Leone at Conakry in October 1997, it had been hoped that tne junta in Sierra Leone would cooperate fully with ECOWAS in the implementation of the agreement, particularly with respect to the deployment of the forces of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in the country to carry out the disarmament and demobilization aspects of the peace plan. Regrettably, the junta has acted consistently in breach of the agreement and has exhibited attitudes designed to frustrate the peace process and entrench itself in office. Meanwhile, ECOMOG forces which have been peacefully deployed in parts of Sierra Leone have become targets of unprovoked and incessant attacks by the junta. The present engagement of ECOMOG forces with the junta in Sierra Leone was the direct result of these unprovoked attacks, launched by elements of the illegal regime against the ECOMOG peacekeeping forces.

We have always made it clear that the rules of engagement for peacekeeping provide that ECOMOG forces defend themselves if attacked. Therefore, the junta in Sierra Leone was in no doubt as to the consequences of their reckless actions.

We have now received information that Freetown as well as most parts of Sierra Leone are now firmly under the control of ECOMOG forces and are satisfied that this has been achieved with a minimum loss of lives. We congratulate the new Force Commander of ECOMOG, Major-General Timothy Shelpidi, and the ECOMOG High Command for their professionalism, determination and commitment to implement the ECOWAS mandate. We commend, in particular, the Commander of the ECOMOG forces in Sierra Leone, Colonel Maxwell Kobe, and his men for their courage and gallantry in carrying out their assignment.

We call upon the remnants of the junta in Sierra Leone, most of whom are now on the run, scattered in the countryside of Sierra Leone, to cooperate fully with ECOMOG in the implementation of its mandate, leading to the full restoration of the legitimate Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in line with the ECOWAS peace plan.

Now that ECOMOG has control of most parts of the country, we call upon all friends of Sierra Leone to assist in the urgent tasks of bringing humanitarian relief to the people of Sierra Leone. ECOMOG, for its part, is now taking steps to establish safe and secure havens for the people of Sierra Leone and credible corridors and security for the distribution of relief materials.

We urge the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, to facilitate the deployment of the United Nations military observer mission to Sierra Leone, now that its safety in the country can be guaranteed. We call

upon the international community to assist ECOMOG in the pursuit of its mission in Sierra Leone.

We reaffirm our commitment to the full implementation of the ECOWAS peace plan for Sierra Leone, leading to the reinstatement of the legitimate Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah by 22 April 1998.

Further, we express our appreciation to members of the international community for the support accorded to ECOWAS and to the ECOWAS Ministerial Committee of Five on Sierra Leone during the past months in the task of resolving the crisis in Sierra Leone. We look forward to their continued support.

We are awaiting a detailed report from the ECOMOG Force Commander in order that appropriate recommendations could be made to the Chairman of ECOWAS, General Sani Abacha, in furtherance of the implementation of the objectives of the ECOWAS peace plan for Sierra Leone.